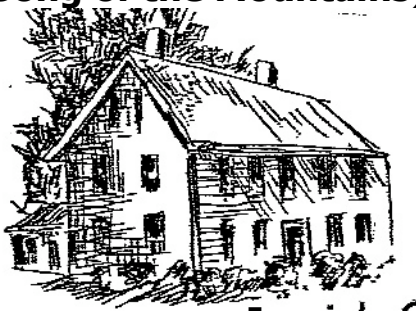


CONGREGATION SHIR HEHARIM

(Song of the Mountains)



The Brattleboro Area Jewish Community

June 2009

Sivan / Tammuz 5769

FROM YOUR SHALIACH TZIBUR

In my final column next month, I'll be offering some reflections on the past eight- and-a- half years and my gratitude to you all.

This column is about *tikkun olam* and what we do to help others in difficult times. I'd like to dedicate it to the 45 families or individuals (count them!) who helped out the needy at the Brattleboro Overflow Shelter this winter, and to Bobbe who did such an outstanding job getting us organized.

Economic hardship challenges all of us. And yet we know well from our own history that it is exactly at such times of hardship that the community spirit that we so cherish often flourishes; that our communal feeling, our common sense of responsibility, that remarkable understanding of interdependence that our ancestors knew so well, comes to the surface.

In my poverty-alleviation work in Asia and Africa, I have seen countless instances in which groups and individuals come together for mutual assistance, particularly in times of need. In parts of Indonesia, each household at harvest time places in common storage a prescribed amount of grain, which is distributed to the neediest families later in the year. In Ethiopia, there is an Amharic term which translates roughly as "oppression of the soul." If you've lost a child or a spouse, you are characterized as having "oppression of the soul," and the community picks up your responsibilities. And the most poignant example of all: I've seen – too many times – destitute families put aside all pride and carry the wrapped corpse of a departed loved one to the marketplace. Those present at the market set small coins on the body until enough

has been raised to pay for a burial. In time, there are always enough coins.

In Jewish communities, over time, we have seen countless examples of this interdependence, this selfless giving during times of hardship. One Holocaust story that made an indelible impression on me is the story of the orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto. Surely every family in the Ghetto had its own pressing needs and concerns. Yet they collectively supported this orphanage and other such services, some even choosing to remain in the Ghetto when offered escape so that they could provide necessary services. One such individual was the physician and writer Henryk Goldszmit. Goldszmit became so devoted to the children of this orphanage that when the moment of deportation finally arrived in August 1942, he just couldn't abandon them. He just couldn't let them go alone and so he stayed with them – all the way to Treblinka.

There are also plenty of examples right here in Brattleboro, friends. When Gary was struck with MS, without any form of health insurance, BAJC rallied around him and his family. When Jesse was stricken with leukemia, we did the same. When two-year-old Talia was diagnosed with a weak heart, we cooked meals for the family. We take turns driving loved ones to the hospital for treatment. Our students provide Shabbat meals at Morningside Shelter and raise money to purchase bed nets to combat malaria in Africa.

Let's continue to be a community that offers Chanukah celebrations and Passover seders at nursing homes, providing comfort to those who are ill. And when they

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move on to *Olam Haba*, the World to Come, let us continue to cleanse and pray over their bodies, and sit with them until it is time to lay their bodies in the earth. Let's continue to support projects for disadvantaged children in the Dominican Republic and Argentina and India. Let's continue providing counseling to families in need. Let's continue working together with those of other faith communities to meet the needs of our local community while taking actions together that will help save our planet. Let's continue to stand together with our Muslim brothers and sisters at this time of trial. Let's continue helping to bring peace and reconciliation and justice to Israel and Palestine. In the truest spirit of community, when any one of us does any of these things, we do them on behalf of all of us. It's acts such as these that truly demonstrate *tikkun olam* – the great mission of our people.

B'Shalom,
Jim

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

In June, we are going to read *Sh'lach L'cha* (**Numbers 13:1-15:41**), perhaps the oldest spy story in history. In that parashat (Torah portion), God tells Moses to send--*Sh'lach L'cha*-- twelve men, a leader from each tribe, to scout the land of Canaan.

Moses instructs the scouts (or in Hebrew "spies") to go first to the Negev and then proceed up into the hill country. The scouts are to determine the quality of the land, the strength of the people inhabiting the land, and whether or not these inhabitants live in fortified cities or out in the open. Moses also asks the scouts to bring back samples of the native fruits.

The scouts return after forty days. They carry a cluster of grapes so large that it takes two men to lift it. They also bring back figs and pomegranates. The scouts report that the land is indeed very good and describe it as flowing with milk and honey. But they also report that the people who inhabit the land are giants, who live in well-fortified cities.

One spy, Caleb, dissents and shouts above the others: "Let us by all means go up...*ki yachol nuchal lah*, for we shall surely overcome it." (Numbers 13:30) The ten spies retort that conquest is impossible: "We looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, and so we must have looked to them." (Numbers 13:33)

Despite Joshua and Caleb's calls for courage, the Israelite people give up, and for this they are punished with forty more years of wandering in the wilderness until a new, confident generation would arise. (Numbers 14: 26–35) Thus the first biblical spy story.

The most powerful words in the parashat for me are those of Caleb: *Ki yachol nuchal lah*, "For we shall surely overcome it." These words can also be translated as "We Shall Overcome," the title of the signature song of the American Civil Rights Movement. That song reminded those involved in the struggle that they were not grasshoppers but human beings, capable of changing their own destiny, able to attract friends and allies to their cause, empowered to change age-old discrimination.

These words were phrased differently by Theodor Herzl when he stated, "If you will it, it is no dream." Zionist organizers and pioneers, farmers and fighters, Israeli youth and statesmen, immigrants from one hundred countries, and refugees from the Holocaust: None of them saw themselves as grasshoppers. They had a collective confidence—a sense that they could "surely overcome it." The modern State of Israel remains one of the most remarkable achievements of the human spirit.

At BAJC, we are preparing for our Annual Meeting on July 6 at which we will reflect on the past year and look forward to the next. This year much was accomplished. Our membership coffee klatches and subsequent Board retreat have generated a lot of positive ideas. In the coming fiscal year, we will be faced with some apparent obstacles – the economy, a search for a spiritual leader, the size of our building, enhancing our religious school. But, I am confident that we will meet each challenge by repeating Caleb's words, *Ki yachol nuchal lah*, "For we shall surely overcome it," because these words have the power to help us achieve more than we thought we could.

These words express faith that we are not grasshoppers but human beings created in God's image and that God is with us in our struggles to continuously improve as individuals and as nations. They also remind us that in our personal and communal struggles, we can draw on divine energy to lift us higher than we thought we could ever go. *Ki yachol nuchal lah*.

B'shalom,
Marty



SAVE THE DATE!

The third annual Israeli Film and Food Festival is scheduled for the weekend of August 22-23

ADULT EDUCATION IN MAY

Sign up now for **Judaism and Magic**, a class on June 10th at 7:00 taught by Margie Pivar, co-author of *Fourth Uncle in the Mountain*, the story of a Buddhist doctor in Viet Nam. The class will learn about some of the miracles and magic behind many of the stories in Talmud, Torah, and the Gospels and will explore modern-day ideas about magic. Please register for this class online at www.bajcvermont.org or on the adult ed voicemail at 257-1959, as soon as possible.

Torah study this month will be on two Wednesday evenings, the 10th and the 24th at 7:00, led by Marty Cohn. Yoga and the Jewish Spirit will meet at 6:30 on the 14th, led by Kim Friedman.

In addition to three b'nai mitzvah in June (on the 6th in Saxtons River, the 20th in Grafton, and the 27th at West Village Meeting House), there are two Friday night Kabbalat Shabbat services. The one on June 12th at 6:00 will be led by Jim, and will be followed at 7:00 by a vegetarian/dairy potluck supper. The fourth Friday late service, led by Marty, is at 7:30 on June 26th.

*We invite you to join us as we
celebrate a special day in our lives:
the Bat Mitzvah of our daughter*

Hannah

*Saturday, June 6th at 10:00 a.m. at the
Chivers Center, Vermont Academy
Saxtons River, Vermont*

- Mark and Laura

Directions to Hannah's bat mitzvah: Take I-91 to Vermont Exit 5. Take the left fork at the exit ramp (ignoring signs for Routes 5 and 121 and Saxtons River to the right). The road will come to a T; at this intersection turn right onto Back Westminster Road and follow this road for approximately 2 1/2 miles until its junction with Rte. 121. Turn left onto Route 121 and proceed approximately 3 miles to the village of Saxtons River. In the village, you will see a sign for Vermont Academy on the right. Take the next right onto Pleasant Street and then the second left on Shepard Lane. Chivers Center is on the left, across from the baseball field.

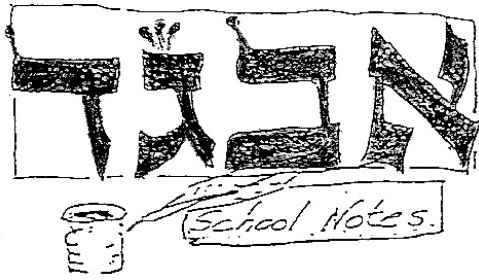
ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING...AND AFTER

The annual BAJC membership meeting will be held on Monday evening, July 6th at 6:30. It will be preceded by a barbecue at 5:30. We will supply hotdogs and hamburgers, rolls and condiments, soda and iced tea. Please bring non-dairy salads to share.

To vote at the meeting you need to be a member in good standing. Family membership entitles you to two votes; individual and seasonal members are entitled to one. There will be several opportunities to vote, including election of six members to fill openings on the Board of Trustees. The annual budget presented by our treasurer will propose a membership dues schedule and Hebrew school tuition for the new year starting on September 1st. The agenda for the meeting also includes a "state of the shul" report from our president. If you have any questions or concerns about your membership status, please contact Faith before the annual meeting.

Much planning for the new year will be occurring after the annual meeting. If you know a child who is not currently attending Hebrew school but who wants to attend in September, please let Faith know as soon as possible. There are lots of changes taking place in personnel and structure, so we need to know as soon as possible how many children (seven years of age or older) will be in school. Summer is also a good time to establish your membership commitment for the new year, to make arrangements for dues abatement if needed, and to set up an automatic debit system if that is a more convenient way for you to pay your dues. The summer newsletter will have forms you can fill out for membership and Hebrew school as well as information about the high holy days and opportunities for you to sign up to do one or more of the many things we need for our holiday services.

Also over the summer we will be preparing a *Book of Remembrance*, to be used at the Yom Kippur service and the three other Yizkor services on the calendar of the Jewish year. If you would like to have names listed in the book for the first time, please send BAJC your name(s) and the name(s) you want remembered, along with a check for \$6 per name. If you had names in the book last year and want them in again, or if you have any changes or additions, or questions about the names in the book, please contact Faith or send BAJC a check for \$6 per name.



Here are some end-of-the-year notes from our dedicated and delightful Hebrew school teachers.

From Emily: This has been a wonderful year with the students in Kita Bet. We have read many bible stories along the way and have connected them to the holidays we have celebrated through the year. We worked very diligently on our Hebrew. Most of the students have strong alef-bet letter recognition and they know the sounds the letters make. At least half the students can put the letters together so they can sound out words with little or no difficulty. This is a wonderful accomplishment! We played lots of Hebrew Hangman and enjoyed many other Hebrew reading games and, of course, we fit in as much alef-bet yoga as we possibly could. Thank you for the exuberant energy of your children. Have a fabulous summer

From Jackie: Kita Gimmel was a class of curious students this year. We have learned to read the shema, not just recite it from memory, and to recognize particular root "prayer words" common throughout the liturgy. We really STUDIED the commandments and tried to find ways to do mitzvot. The culmination of our year-long tzedakah project was our chesed trip to the Morningside House, where we anonymously dropped off toys, magazines, and cupcakes we had iced and decorated. This was the "capstone project" of our study of Maimonides' Ladder and the Ten Commandments.

This little trip required quite a ruse, in which we pretended we were looking for a house for a birthday party to which we had been invited so that residents or administrators at Morningside would not guess why we were there. We had a great discussion afterward about how it felt to give anonymously. Another Kita Gimmel mitzvah contributed to our own community and to the earth--we planted perennials on the roadside slope to beautify the grounds at our synagogue and to prevent soil erosion. We hope in the future to have a garden on our grounds where we can plant vegetables to donate to needy people, but for this year each student was given a six-pack of gourds and winter squash to plant at home or in community gardens so they can harvest gourds for our sukkah

and winter squash to give to the Drop-in Center in the fall. Recently, we made mezzuzot from porcelain clay, donated by Anna Fadeley, a potter whose own child attended our Jewish community school more than 20 years ago! This art project complemented our Hebrew study and our Tzedakah theme. All in all, it was a very satisfying year.

From David:

I have watched our 5th-6th graders mature into b'nai mitzvah-ready students. We learned new prayers and blessings and talked about Jewish history. We started out with eleven students and even with the competition from soccer games, basket ball games, track and field, and plays and musicals, there was always a quorum of six to nine kids in every class. I could not have accomplished all I did without the help of super-volunteer Diane, who was truly a co-teacher and not just a helper. She has great insight into Jewish history and Torah and was able to give individual help with Hebrew reading. Recently each student in our class was evaluated for Hebrew reading skills. Parents of students moving on to the b'nai mitzvah class in the fall will be given recommendation for summer learning so that all will be Hebrew-ready when school starts in the fall. Have a great summer everyone.

From Kate: One by one my students are "graduating," with beautiful and moving b'nai mitzvah services. I am so proud of every one of them! They have all learned and grown. I am particularly proud of how they have tackled several "mitzvah projects" such as raising money for "Nothing But Nets" and "LifeStraws." I think they all feel empowered to go forth and do more mitzvot. This year has been a steep learning curve for them, and for me as well. I have had years of experience as a teacher, but not in a classroom setting and not with this material. I've garnered lots of ideas from the classes I've been taking as part of my Cantor Educator Program at Hebrew College while I've been teaching this class but, most of all, I've learned a tremendous amount from my students and from their parents. If you have a suggestion, a question, or a comment about our b'nai mitzvah program, please do not hesitate to call me. I have committed to teaching the class again next year, and I am looking forward to it and to hearing from you! Thank you, Niko, Gaia, Noa, Phoebe, Louisa, Hannah, Josh, Isabel, Graham (whose bar mitzvah will be in September), and Ari (who isn't doing a Bar Mitzvah this year, but may some day). You are all the coolest, and you have been very patient with my "on the job" learning.

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Judith's Kita Aleph report will appear in the next newsletter. In the meantime, please register students for next year's classes as soon as possible. Contact Faith if you have any questions or if you need another copy of the registration form. It is especially important that we know as soon as possible of any new students who want to attend Hebrew school in the fall.

With great regret, we have accepted Emily's decision to not teach in our Hebrew school next year, but we are pleased that she will continue to be involved with the school, helping out now and then for holidays and other special events.) Depending on the number of students we'll have for next year, we may need a new teacher, and there is also a possibility that we will be hiring a Director for the school. If you know anyone interested in these positions or if you want information about the job descriptions, please contact Faith.

HISTORIC SUPREME COURT DECISION IN ISRAEL

On May 19th IRAC (the Israel Religious Action Committee), the legal advocacy arm of the Reform movement in Israel, won a precedent-setting case in the Israeli Supreme Court. The verdict of the Court says that the State has to provide equal funding for Reform and Conservative conversion classes. This is the first time that the Court has declared that government funding must be provided to non-Orthodox Jewish religious services in Israel. The verdict goes well beyond simply granting equal funding; it addresses the core issue of religious freedom in Israel. The three-judge panel found the State's practice of favoring only one Jewish stream (the Orthodox) discriminatory and contradictory to their responsibility to ensure freedom of religion. The ruling stated that "the duty of the State to pluralism is not only a passive duty, but an active one as well." It also cited a previous ruling (Naamat and IRAC in 2002) that "Jews in Israel cannot be seen as only one religious sect." For more about the work of IRAC to promote pluralism in Israel, go to www.irac.org.

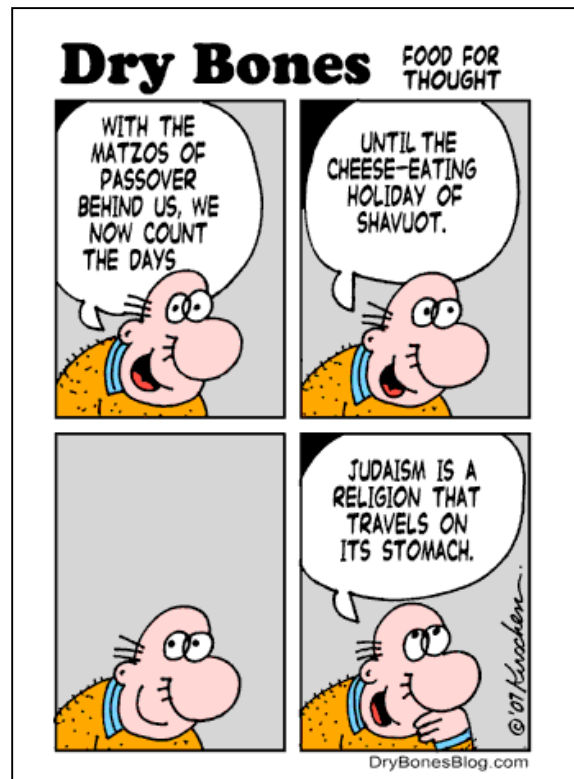


SHAVUOT

Shavuot is a Hebrew word meaning "weeks" and refers to the Jewish festival marking the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Shavuot, like so many other Jewish holidays began as an ancient agricultural festival, marking the end of the spring barley harvest and the beginning of the summer wheat harvest. Shavuot was distinguished in ancient times by bringing crop offerings to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Shavuot, also known as the Festival of the Giving of the Torah, dates from biblical times, and helps to explain the holiday's name, "Weeks." The Torah tells us it took precisely forty-nine days for our ancestors to travel from Egypt to the foot of Mount Sinai (the same number of days as the Counting of the Omer) where they were to receive the Torah. Thus, Leviticus 23:21 commands: "And you shall proclaim that day (the fiftieth day) to be a holy convocation?" The name Shavuot, "Weeks," then symbolizes the completion of a seven-week journey.

Special customs on Shavuot are the reading of the Book of Ruth, which reminds us that we too can find a continual source of blessing in our tradition. Another tradition includes staying up all night to study Torah and Mishnah, a custom called *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, which symbolizes our commitment to the Torah, and that we are always ready and awake to receive the Torah. Traditionally, dairy dishes are served on this holiday to symbolize the sweetness of the Torah, as well as the "land of milk and honey".



SMALL FUNDRAISING

“Small fundraising” is indeed SMALL in this report! Goodsearch had only 52 searches in May—that’s only 52 cents earned for BAJC. Our guess is that BAJC members and friends clicked hundreds and hundreds of times on the Google or Yahoo search engines. If you would simply go to Goodsearch.com instead and register Brattleboro Area Jewish Community as your charity, we could be earning many dollars instead of just a few cents! Goodsearch is, in fact, powered by Yahoo, so you will find whatever you are looking for without any trouble, and it’s easy to make Goodsearch your homepage or to put it on your toolbar.

“Small fundraising” did a little better on soda can deposits, earning \$35 at the last collection and almost \$100 for the year so far. Please continue to bring rinsed deposit bottles and cans to the shed near the barn. It would help a great deal if you put the bottles and cans in the marked containers rather than just dumping bags in the shed, but we will accept bagsful if that’s the only way you can do it. Please DO NOT bring recyclables...only cans and bottles marked for VT refunds.

Please also continue to bring used printer ink cartridges to the shul. If no one is around to take them, you can leave them in a plastic bag near the shul door. We can also now take large toner cartridges from copy machines. So far this year we have earned \$57 from printer cartridges.

And for mitzvah rather than money, please continue to bring current magazine and travel-size (and other) cosmetics, shampoos, etc. to the shul. These too can be left at the door in plastic bags when no one is around to accept them. These items are greatly appreciated when we deliver them to the Morningside Shelter and the Drop-in Center.

Robin and Potter invite the congregation to join them to celebrate the bat mitzvah of their daughter

Isabel

on Saturday, June 27th at 10 a.m. at the West Village Meeting House

A celebratory kiddush will follow the morning service.

SUMMER FUNDRAISER AND THE BUDGET

An important part of the budget that will be presented at the annual membership meeting on July 6th is \$8,500 projected income from fundraising. In order to reach this figure, we need enthusiastic support from our membership and friends for the Israeli Film and Food Festival in August, the major fundraising effort of the year. The flyer in this newsletter once again gives you the opportunity to order tickets to either or both film showings and to advertise in the program book for the festival. Personal ads as well as business ads will be very welcome. Taking out an ad is a perfect way to show your support for BAJC and for this particular effort even if, for some reason, you can’t attend the Festival events. If you don’t have a camera-ready ad or a business card, contact Faith to set up wording for a patron line or for a larger ad.



WHY SUPPORT ARZA?

“We are engaged in a struggle for the very soul of Israel,” stated Rabbi Stanley Davids, immediate past president of ARZA at a recent ARZA Executive Committee meeting. By bringing the weight of the most populous and powerful stream of Judaism in the United States, ARZA and its members can help further the notion that Israel can and must live up to its pluralistic and democratic values. Involvement with ARZA means engaging in the serious work of building a Jewish state. We can and must have a say in what it means to be Jewish in Israel.

Kim and Edward and Leah and Josh would like you to share in the bar mitzvah celebration of

Joshua Max

on Saturday, June 20th at 10:00 a.m. at the White Church in Grafton, VT

Luncheon will follow the service.

Directions to Josh’s bar mitzvah: Take Route 30 north towards Route 35 in Townshend. In Townshend stay right at the high school towards Grace Cottage (on Route 35). Go 3.4 miles, then look for sign that says Historic Grafton and take a left on Grafton Road. Take Grafton Road 6.6 miles to where it dead ends into Main Street. Go left on Main St. About one block up, look for the White Church, on the right..

THE TIMES THEY ARE A'CHANGIN'

As you know from recent letters you received from Marty and Jim, and as you can tell from articles in the newsletter, BAJC is finding itself in a transitional time of development and growth. Many issues and decisions face us as we consider spiritual leadership, educational leadership, and building space needs. You will be hearing more about these issues at the annual membership meeting on July 6th and in future newsletters.

The first step in a search for a spiritual leader is to understand the spiritual needs of the congregation. We will form a committee to survey the BAJC membership, using a form created by URJ to help accomplish this task. The committee's charge is to present the survey and compile the answers in preparation for beginning a rabbi search. The chair of this committee will also serve later on the search committee. If you are interested in participating in this process, please contact Marty.

The education committee has prepared a job description for the position of Education Director of our Hebrew school and is ready to advertise for candidates. What is needed now is a committee to interview candidates and make a recommendations to the education committee. If you are interested in serving on this committee, please contact Marty.

BAJC was fortunate to be chosen as one of six projects undertaken by the Collaborative Architectural Project at Keene State College. Some interesting and exciting ideas have come from the team that developed an expansion plan for our synagogue and Hebrew school. Their plans might well be the basis for a capital campaign to provide the space we need for our growing congregation. We hope to have some of the plans to show you at the annual meeting on July 6th and at a series of follow-up meetings. Any plans for building expansion require a committee to get things rolling. If you are interested in working on a capital campaign and/or on a building committee, please contact Marty.

SJBC

The Significant Jewish Books Club is reading *Sarah's Key*, by Tatiana DeRosnay. If you would like to order the book for \$9, contact Faith (464-2632 or schuster@sover.net). All are welcome to join the potluck supper and book talk at 6:30 on July 23rd at the shul.

BAJC MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to provide a context and structure for people to be Jewish together in a rural environment. This community fosters Jewish pride and identity by participating together in religious, spiritual, educational, social and cultural experiences. We welcome anyone interested in participating and learning.

BAJC DIRECTORY

Spiritual leader: James Levinson

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Newsletter deadline: the 15th of each month

Webmaven: Julie Strothman



NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTIONS

This online copy of our newsletter is a much-reduced version of the real thing! The print version includes Honorable Menschen, Yahrzeits, and other individual member news. If you are not a member but would like to receive the newsletter, we ask that you contribute \$36 to BAJC for a subscription for the year 5769. Your subscription will include frequent e-mail updates. (If you want the newsletter but do not want to receive e-mails, please let Faith know.)